

## Tips for Reducing Mosquito Bites

Sources: Metropolitan Mosquito Control District, Beyond Pesticides, Consumer Reports

Mosquito season will be here before you know it. Here are some good tips that can help you and your family enjoy the outdoors with fewer itchy bumps.

### Remove standing water.

Eliminating mosquito breeding areas near the house is more effective than spraying for adult mosquitoes. Anything that holds water for several days can breed mosquito larvae. Remove standing water from gutters, treeholes, containers, or anything else. See the accompanying graphic for more information. For standing water that you are unable to drain, including ponds and rain barrels, use biological controls (such as Bti) to target mosquito larvae.

### Use physical control.

Similar to tick control, vegetation management around the house can reduce the number of adult mosquitoes. Keep your grass under 2 inches in length, which reduces excess harborage - this is where mosquitoes like to hide out during the day. Also make sure that window and door screens are secure and have no holes. For outdoor seating areas, an electric fan will go a long way in reducing the presence of mosquitoes. There are also commercial mosquito traps that you could purchase and place in your yard. Some traps are designed to lure mosquitoes by emitting CO<sub>2</sub>; others collect the eggs laid by container-breeding mosquitoes. Don't forget to encourage natural populations of mosquito predators, including bats, birds, and frogs.

### Use personal protection.

Wear long sleeves and pants and light colors. Use repellents and apply them according to label instructions. Repellents like oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE) and picaridin (derived from pepper) are the best least-toxic options that maintain high efficacy. Data shows OLE-based repellents are just as effective as the synthetic DEET formulations. Avoid wearing artificial scents like perfumes or scented hairspray. Stay indoors during the peak mosquito feeding times of dawn and dusk.

### Consider calling in a professional.

As a **LAST** resort, if mosquitoes are really unbearable in your yard, you might want to call in a licensed pesticide applicator. ***Please keep in mind that spraying to kill adult mosquitoes is not the most effective way to manage mosquitoes.*** If you choose to hire a company to control mosquitoes, be sure to ask questions and check credentials. Refer to the article in the February issue of the North Oaks News for more information on using licensed pesticide applicators. In the meantime, check out these recommendations:

- Ask to see a license or certification, a label for the insecticide being used, and protective gear. The license should be current, the label should indicate which chemicals the company is using, and the company should provide protective gear for its employees.
- Ask whether the company has a plan to protect nontarget organisms. The chemicals used to kill mosquitoes can also kill good insects, such as honeybees, ladybugs, and butterflies.

- Ask whether the business makes follow-up visits to ensure that its insecticide treatment has worked. Good companies will come back periodically to test the area to see that their chemicals are working against the mosquito population.

Don't forget to be skeptical. The legitimacy of any pest-control company isn't the only thing you should watch out for. Here are a few other things to keep in mind:

- Think twice about “all organic” claims. There's no official standard for the term when it comes to insect abatement. There's no guarantee that something labeled organic is any safer than anything else.
- Reject mosquito misting systems. The use of these automated spraying systems, which function like automatic water sprinklers, is growing. But the devices are not EPA-approved, and they're quite expensive. Because they don't allow for a nuanced approach to pest management (they generally involve spraying a single chemical across an entire yard), they can breed insecticide resistance.
- Be mindful of insecticide resistance. The way people control their pest situations—the chemicals that are sprayed and the way they are sprayed—can make the problem of insecticide resistance much better or much worse. So it's important to make sure that any company you work with handles these chemicals responsibly. A professional will know that rotating chemicals from year to year is a good way to prevent resistance from developing in a local insect population.

\*\*\* The Pesticide Committee is interested in hearing about your successes or failures with any of these techniques. Please email [KWinsor@northoaksmn.gov](mailto:KWinsor@northoaksmn.gov) with your comments.\*\*\*